# The Interview Trump Card:

# The Cover Letter

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# What will we cover?

1. General Advice
2. Understanding the Scene
   - The market
   - The search committee
3. Prepare Yourself
4. Your Cover Letter
5. Closing Thoughts on Improving Your Odds
6. Resources

# General Advice

Seek out opportunities now that reflect…

- Engagement
- Enthusiasm, and
- Leadership

…in the area of Librarianship you are interested in pursuing

(NOW!)

# General Advice

There are no “tricks”

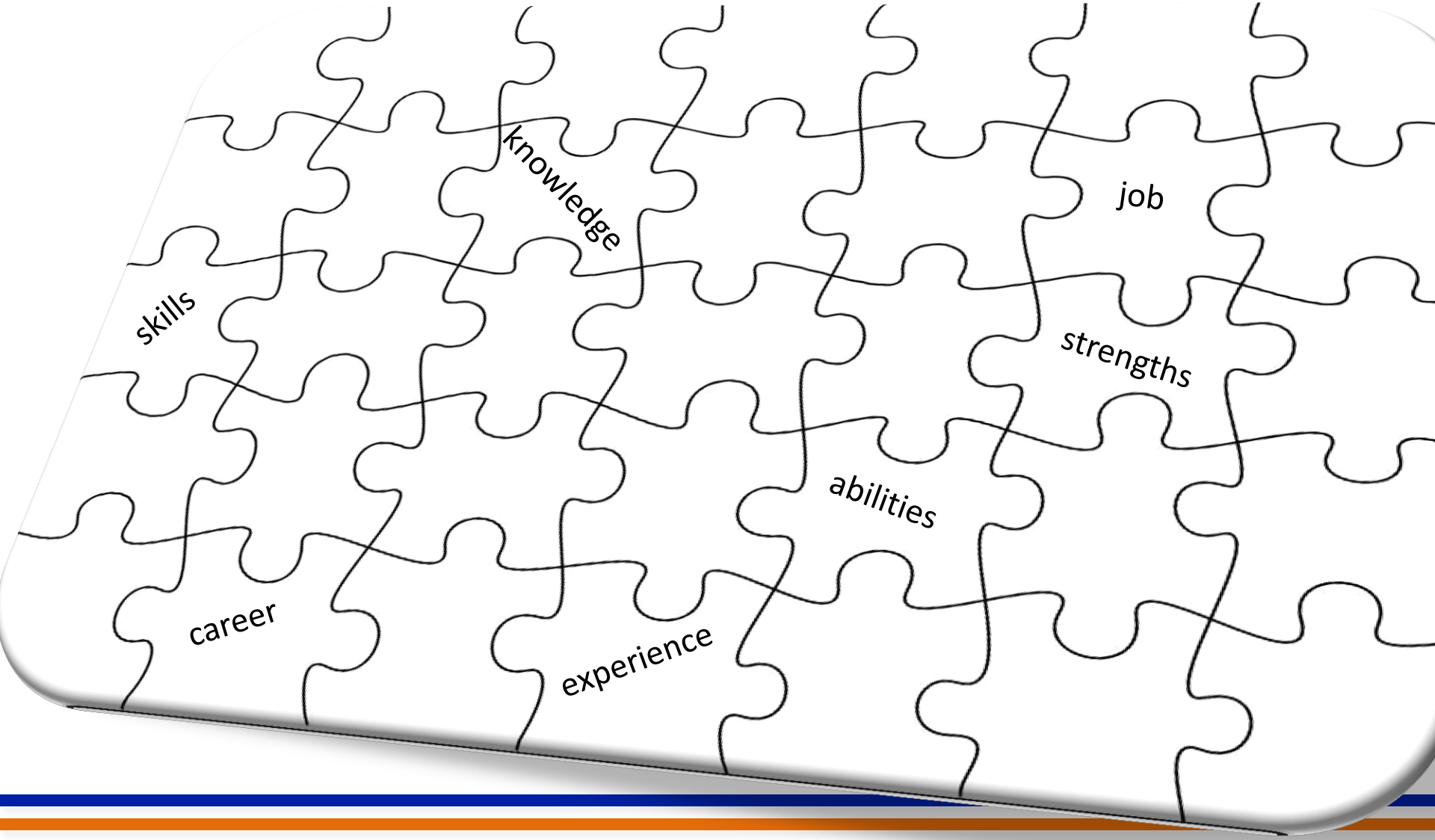
-But, knowledge, preparation and technique will improve your odds

# General Advice

Get it right the first time!

# General Advice

Do not apply for jobs you are not qualified for – period!


knowledge
job
skills
strengths
abilities
career
experience

# Understanding the Scene

The market means more deliberate recruiting

- Many libraries are shrinking
- Which positions to recruit for
- Distinguishing between minimally, well, very well, ideally and overly qualified
- Selecting candidates for phone interviews
- Selecting 2 candidates for onsite interviews

# Understanding the Scene

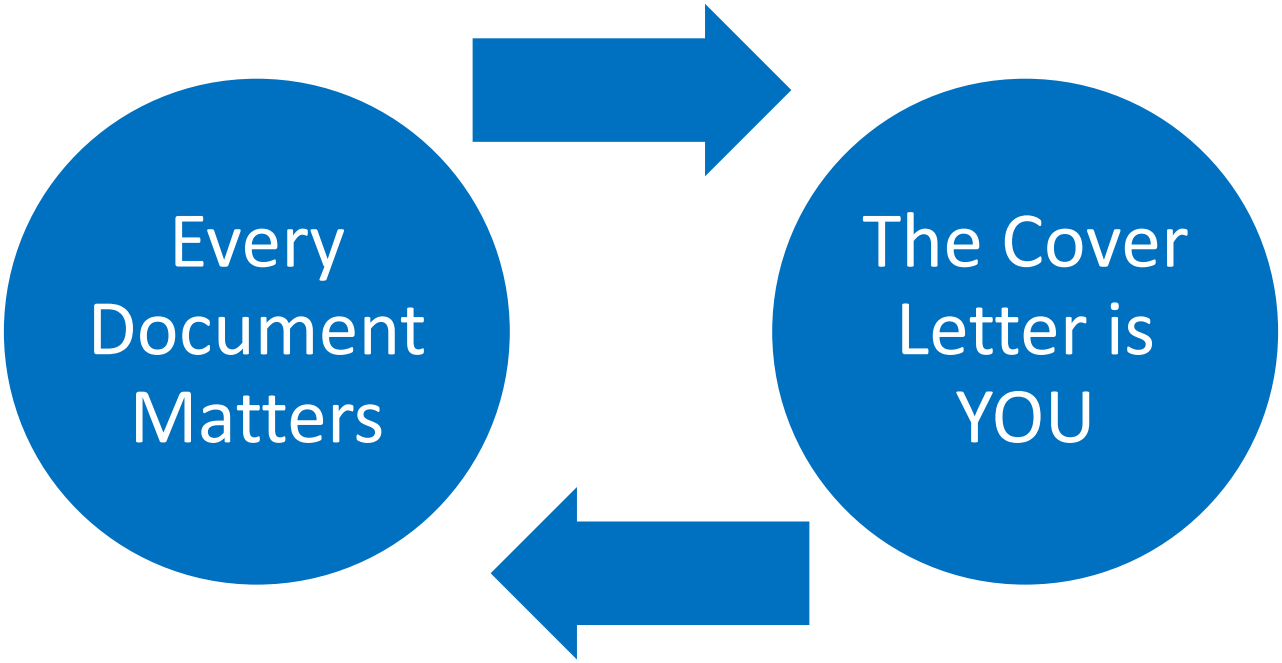
Opportunities to your message

- Documents
  - CV or Resume
  - Cover Letter

deliver

- References
- Interview Sessions
- Presentation
- Your interactions with staff at all stages

# Understanding the Scene



Take advantage of the unique opportunity afforded by your cover letter

The only chance you have to sell yourself to get an interview

# What you need to know about search committees

Members:

- ✓ They are conscientious
- ✓ They are likely to be intelligent
- ✓ They likely have a stake in the position and, therefore, the search
- ✓ They may not be skilled recruiters…

# What you need to know about search committees

- Selection is weeding out
- Assessing the fit for the position takes 2 forms

1. Measurement
   - Experience
   - Educational credentials

2. Judgment or inference
   - Good colleague?
   - Suitability?

# What you need to know about search committees

What they want to know:

1. Can you do the job? - Strengths
2. Will you love the job? - Motivation
3. Can we tolerate working with you? - Fit

**Article in Forbes Magazine**

**Top Executive Recruiters Agree – There Are Only Three True Job Interview Questions**

**http://www.forbes.com/sites/georgebradt/2011/04/27/top-executive-recruiters-agree-there-are-only-three-key-job-interview-questions/**

# What you need to know about search committees

They have limited means to learn about you and use those to learn different things

- Documents
  - CV or Resume
  - Cover Letter

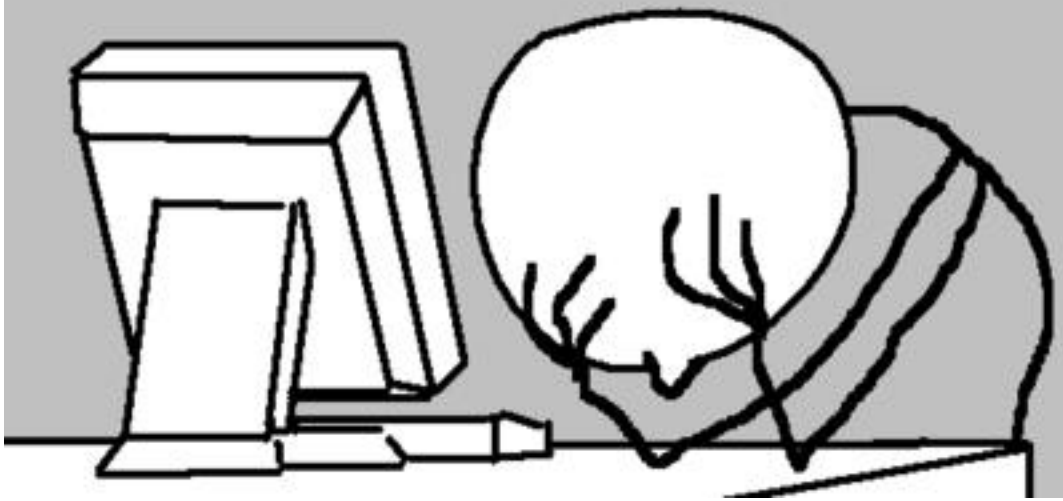
- References
- Interview Sessions
- Presentation
- Your interactions with staff

# What you need to know about search committees

– Do not rely on the search committee to determine the above on their own

– The committee should not have to work hard to figure out whether and how you would be a good fit

# Don’t Despair.



Be Prepared!

# Prepare Yourself

## Analyze the job posting

–Read it and assume it was written deliberately by intelligent people with a real stake in finding the right person for this position

–Assess your fit

- Interesting?
- Qualifications
  - –Required v. Preferred
- Responsibilities
- Salary and location
- Deadline

# Prepare Yourself

Develop your message

- How your qualifications (uniquely) match the job
- Why the job makes sense for you
- Additional knowledge, skills, abilities, insights you offer
    - How these matter

# Prepare Yourself

Be a detective

- Visit in person or on the web
- Discover the culture
- Have there been recent changes?
- Find the mission and vision
- Are the employees active at ALA?
- Talk to someone if you have the opportunity
- Look at the organizational chart

# Prepare Yourself

Be a detective

- Who is the department head?
- Find them on LinkedIn
- Done presentations?
- Published?
- What are their interests?

# Prepare Yourself

One chance to be noticed to get an interview

“The magazine didn’t hire me, but they are paying me $50 to print my cover letter on their joke page.”

# Your cover letter

A good cover
letter graciously tells the committee
what the sum of your education,
skills, and experience will bring to its
organization.

# Your cover letter

A really great cover letter demonstrates savvy with a thoughtful discussion of your experience in light of your knowledge of professional trends and the vision and mission of the organization

# Your Cover Letter

- First opportunity to impress committee
- Your narrative
- This is the ‘mortar’ for your packet
- If you have the qualifications your letter stimulates interest in you and your resume

# Your Cover Letter

- Use standard business letter format
- Do not use your current employer's letterhead
- Grammar and punctuation – pu-leeze! – this is a writing sample!

# Reference

"Job Hunting: What Search Committees Want You to Know"

Candice Benjes-Small, Eric Ackermann, and Gene Hyde

Conference paper available at:

http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/conferences/confsandpreconfs/national/2011/papers/job_hunting.pdf

# Your Cover Letter

- Use an appropriate font and color
- Use the same font and size throughout
- Keep it to 1 to 1 ½ pages

# Your Cover Letter - START

- Use correct institution and address information
- Address it to an appropriate person - research
- Don’t start each sentence with I

# Your cover letter - START

- Refer to correct position, including requisition number and other identifiers provided

- Add where you saw the position posted

- If someone referred you – mention it

- Find a strong start – something that impresses you about the library, department or unit – do your homework!

# Your cover letter - MIDDLE

- Explain your interest – why the position is a good move for you

- Clearly connect your qualifications to the specific job – expand on your resume
  - Why you are an ideal candidate – what you can do for the employer
  - What makes you uniquely qualified
  - Show enthusiasm and understanding

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# Your cover letter - MIDDLE

- Show you've done your research
  - Library's specific challenges
  - Library's specific successes
  - Important pieces of news

# Your cover letter - MIDDLE

- Relevant experience might come from…
  - A different industry
  - A different professional level
  - While in school
  - Through professional service

# Your cover letter - MIDDLE

- Explain your career or personal path but don't focus on what the library can do for you!

- Don't highlight your weaknesses!

- Don't mention salary unless requested

- Enthusiasm Preferred

# Your cover letter - MIDDLE

- Address obvious questions
  - Significant changes in job or institution types
  - Breaks in employment
  - Frequent or numerous job changes
  - Another degree type – do you 'get' libraries?
  - If you started recently, why are you looking to leave your current employer?
  - Any other 'red flags'

# Your cover letter - MIDDLE

- How have your experiences improved your suitability for the position?
- What have you done that stands out?
  - Initiative?
  - Project?
  - Supervision?
- How have you stayed current?
- How have you credentialed yourself?

# Your cover letter - MIDDLE

Strive to express these sought after qualities:

- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Intelligence and aptitude
- Enthusiasm and energy
- Flexibility
- Leadership
- Maturity
- Collaboration

# Your cover letter - MIDDLE

Do not reiterate your RESUME

Complement it!

# Your cover letter - END

- Include ‘Thank you for consideration’
- Restate interest in position
- Available for questions

- Send as PDF

# One last piece of advice for your cover letter:

**don’t rush**

**do your research!!**

**proofread**

**get feedback**

# Resources

- **@ your library**

  **How to get a Great Job: Crafting Effective Cover Letters**

  http://www.atyourlibrary.org/career/how-get-great-job-crafting-effective-cover-letters

- **Open Cover Letters**

  **Anonymous cover letters from hired librarians & archivists**

  http://opencoverletters.com/

# Resources

- **ALA JobLIST – Cover Letters**

  http://joblist.ala.org/modules/jobseeker/CoverLetters.cfm

- **Brian W. Keith – University of Florida Libraries – Associate Dean**

  **The Ins and Outs of Job Hunting for Library Positions – An Insider's Perspective**

  http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00019454

# Thank you and Good Luck!

Bonnie J. Smith

Check out the UF Library Employment Website

http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/pers/careers.htm